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of curing lesser ailments with drugs and herbs which have real medicinal value, but many of their specifics are compounded of ingredients chosen for reasons more magical than medical, and if they have a curative effect, it must be attributed to the faith of the patient. Although the climate of Ta Li is healthy, being dry and free from malaria, the lack of a public health service permits infectious disease a free run until the epidemic has spent its force. Consequently few families are free from sickness in the course of the year, and deaths are always to be expected. Inevitably the people, being accustomed to this prospect, are less affected by the untimely death of a relative than peoples who have come to expect long life as the natural thing and regard early decease as a tragic accident. The Min Chia adult of riper years always has his coffin bought and ready, and death when it comes is met with the accustomed preparations without greatly disorganising the life of the household.

The funeral is arranged for the first lucky day, determined by consulting the calendar in general use, in which such days are marked. The whole family at once puts on mourning, the white costume, from headcloth to shoes, which is traditional with the Chinese, and adopted, like most of the funeral rites, by the Min Chia. This costume is worn until after the funeral, and the headcloth and shoes are retained for one month after the death. Until after the funeral the family avoid sitting on chairs or benches, using only low stools close to the ground, and eat only off a low table, as a sign of grief and humility. The musicians, who should in fact be Buddhist priests, but usually in Ta Li are really laymen, are called in to chant sutras before the coffin, which is placed in the main guest hall in front of the altar of the ancestors. Here it remains for at least one day, or until the earliest auspicious day for the funeral, which will

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764 temporarily filled in and covered with stones until the permanent monument can be built over it. It is sometimes customary to sacrifice a cock at the grave, the bird having been brought there tied on to the coffin lid. This custom is widespread among the Yunnanese Chinese, but not universal with the Min Chia. It is another example of a Chinese custom not yet wholly adopted.

Those mourners who have not accompanied the funeral to the grave may return to the house where a meal is served to all, either in the courtyard of the house, or if it is too small, in a mat shed erected outside the street door. The cost of this entertainment for a large number of people, and that of the funeral ceremonies as a whole is a real burden on poorer families, and it is often said that the two great causes of debt are the costs of marrying many sons, and burying many relatives. The Min Chia funerals are, of course, much less elaborate than the great funerals seen in the large cities of China, where several hundred hired attendants line miles of street, but even so a succession of deaths in a short time can greatly impoverish a family, since a display on these occasions equal to, or beyond their means, is considered essential to their social standing.

765 It is sometimes said that the affectation of excessive grief which custom requires conceals a real indifference, but it would be truer to recognise that the function of these elaborate displays is to occupy the mind and time of relatives who would otherwise be left unoccupied with their sad reflections. No doubt Min Chia relations are sometimes not very distressed at the decease of a domestic tyrant or objectionable sister-in-law, but between most members of the family there is usually the same affection as is found elsewhere, and since the circle of a woman's acquaintance is largely confined to relatives, the death of one of these is more likely to be a real loss than would be the case in com-

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munities where families soon scatter. A deceased person, by the very fact of death, has become one of the ancestral spirits, and as such an object of reverence in an ancestor worshipping society. The funeral has thus a double significance, it is not only a farewell to the deceased, but also the first act of worship paid to his spirit which has now joined the ancestral pantheon.